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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF ATTORNEY GENERAL J.B. VAN HOLLEN IN SUPPORT OF
AB-737**

**Assembly Criminal Justice Committee
Wednesday, January 30, 2008**

Chairman Kleefisch, members of the Committee on Criminal Justice, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Assembly Bill 737. This bill would enable us to implement the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network, a new statewide public safety initiative that we have developed at the Department of Justice.

At the Department of Justice, we exist to assist local law enforcement in our mutual mission to fight crime and enhance public safety. We do this in many ways. One way that we do this is by sharing information. Daily, the Wisconsin Statewide Information Center analyzes and disseminates to the hundreds of law enforcement agencies throughout law enforcement information about unique criminal activity or missing children. By increasing the number of law enforcement aware of a particular criminal trend or enterprise, we increase our chances of capturing suspects or preventing a crime before it occurs. Better information to more law enforcement about criminal activity helps them protect all of us from crime.

The Wisconsin Crime Alert Network takes the concept of electronic information sharing a step further: to those private entities affected by crime on a regular basis. By providing appropriate information to private citizens about criminal activity, law enforcement increases its eyes and ears, resulting in more suspects being caught and more missing children being recovered.

Here's how it will work. Law enforcement trained by the Department of Justice to use the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network would send out messages to participating businesses and members of the community about criminal activity, criminal trends, or missing persons. By using a drop down menu, those messages can be distributed to specific geographic regions—or even statewide—and specify the type of private entity to receive the message. Participants and law enforcement would then receive an email or fax with the message. Alerted and armed with information, participants can be on the lookout for unusual behavior or identified suspects. This will help them protect themselves—and help them alert law enforcement.

The concept of law enforcement sharing information about criminal activity with affected members of the local community is not new. What is new is the capability to efficiently transmit information to different regions throughout the state so that members of all potentially affected communities. And we should take advantage of that capability.

Take for example a series of OxyContin thefts from pharmacies in Southeastern Wisconsin. An alert could be sent out by the responding local law enforcement agency to pharmacies in the region who are members of the network. The alerts could carry images from security cameras or descriptions of suspects, allowing pharmacies to be on the lookout for the suspects. By reporting suspicious activity to police, they can protect themselves, their inventory, and ultimately those who might become hooked on the stolen prescription drugs that would have been otherwise distributed at a local high school. Or take an example of a scrap metal theft in Sister Bay. It isn't enough to notify the community in Door County that a scrap metal theft has occurred. The thief may go elsewhere to liquidate his stolen goods. By notifying the participating businesses that purchase and process scrap metal in Milwaukee, they can be on the lookout for the stolen goods described in a crime alert. When the thief attempts to sell to them, law enforcement can be contacted.

Sometimes statewide distribution will be appropriate. Take for example an abducted child. An alert containing pictures of the child could be sent throughout the network, and those on the lookout can report sightings to law enforcement. It was this very scenario that alerted me to how truly life saving a statewide crime alert network could be. Last year, the Department of Justice issued an amber alert. It was believed the abductor was taking the children north or northwest. Before the missing children could be recovered in Wisconsin, their abductor had taken them to Minnesota. Thankfully, Minnesota has a crime alert network similar to the one I am endorsing today. Information contained in the Wisconsin amber alert was transmitted over Minnesota's network. A participating hotel received the alert, and hotel staff recognized the suspect from the crime alert message. They contacted area law enforcement, and the children were recovered safely.

Assembly Bill 737 authorizes the creation of the Wisconsin Crime Alert Network. Creation of the system will not require any general revenue. It authorizes the Department of Justice to charge a fee to those private entities that choose to participate. This fee should be nominal. In Minnesota, where a similar network has been in existence for over 12 years, over 10,000 businesses are members and pay just \$12 a year to participate. One dollar per month to assist law enforcement in the apprehension of suspects—and to make their businesses and communities safer. Linking law enforcement with businesses creates a web of safety that each of our communities deserve.

I strongly believe in this initiative. If this legislation is enacted and we are permitted to implement this program, then I will pledge Department of Justice discretionary settlement funds to get the program off the ground while we sign up members. Once launched, I believe businesses will participate, and do so in broad numbers. Every business group I or my staff have met with has indicated strong support and a belief that many of their members would enthusiastically participate. That makes sense. Businesses have an intrinsic interest in participating. Not only can they help protect their staff and their inventory by participating, not only are many businesses throughout the state interested in the safety of their communities, but

safer streets enhances business. 10,000 businesses participate in a Minnesota's similar program. It should never be forgotten that reducing crime and enhancing public safety is a critical component of healthy local economies.

Chairman Kleefisch and members, this program has the ability to make each and every one of your districts safer. Increasing the eyes and ears of law enforcement is a major step to make all of our communities safer.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.